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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VATICAN 004570

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE: LEVIN; DRL/IRF: HEWETT; EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2013

TAGS: [GG](#) [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN MIFFED, REALISTIC ABOUT GEORGIAN ABOUT FACE ON BILATERAL AGREEMENT

REF: A. TBILISI 2196

[¶](#)B. TBILISI 2111

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM D. BRENT HARDT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

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SUMMARY  
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[¶](#)1. (C) VATICAN AUTHORITIES WERE SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA'S DECISION NOT TO SIGN AN INTERSTATE AGREEMENT THAT HAD BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE HOLY SEE. FOREIGN MINISTER JEAN LOUIS TAURAN HAD UNUSUALLY STRONG WORDS IN THE MEDIA AS HE CONCLUDED HIS FRUITLESS VISIT TO GEORGIA, DESCRIBING THE DECISION AS A "GRIEVOUS OFFENSE." VATICAN OFFICIALS TOLD EMBASSY THE AGREEMENT PROVIDED NOTHING MORE THAN A GUARANTEE OF LEGAL STATUS TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GEORGIA AND DID NOT REPRESENT A THREAT TO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. THOUGH OUR INTERLOCUTORS BLAMED THE ORTHODOX CHURCH FOR INSTIGATING THE GOG'S ABOUT FACE, THEY WERE REALISTIC ABOUT THE MYRIAD PRESSURES THE ORTHODOX AND GOG FACED, AND SAID THEY DID NOT EXPECT THE INCIDENT TO REVERBERATE TO THE WIDER DETRIMENT OF CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

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FM TAURAN LASHES OUT AT GOG  
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[¶](#)2. (SBU) VATICAN AUTHORITIES WERE MIFFED OVER THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA'S SURPRISE DECISION LAST MONTH NOT TO SIGN AN INTERSTATE AGREEMENT THAT HAD BEEN NEGOTIATED WITH THE HOLY SEE (REFTELS) AND HAD BEEN SLATED TO BE SIGNED DURING THE VISIT OF HOLY SEE FOREIGN MINISTER ARCHBISHOP (SOON-TO-BE-CARDINAL) JEAN LOUIS TAURAN TO TBILISI SEPTEMBER 18-20. TAURAN TOLD THE PRESS TERSELY THAT THE "LAST-MINUTE RETHINK ON THE PART OF THE GEORGIAN AUTHORITIES" WAS A SLAP IN THE FACE FOR CATHOLICS IN GEORGIA, AND DEcried THE LACK OF LEGAL RIGHTS FOR THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY. THE NORMALLY MEASURED TAURAN REFERRED TO THE DECISION AS A "GRIEVOUS OFFENSE" AND ACCUSED THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF A MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN ON THE ISSUE, DESPITE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S WILLINGNESS TO SHARE INFORMATION ON THE GOVERNMENT TALKS. WHEN TAURAN WENT ON TO SAY THE INCIDENT WOULD "CAUSE GREAT SUFFERING" TO THE AILING POPE JOHN PAUL II, WHO HAD CHAMPIONED CATHOLIC-ORTHODOX RECONCILIATION IN A 1999 VISIT TO GEORGIA, HE WAS HITTING THE GEORGians WITH BOTH BARRELS.

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HOLY SEE: NO PLAN FOR PRIMACY, PROSELYTISM IN GEORGIA  
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[¶](#)3. (C) WHEN THE SMOKE HAD CLEARED SOMEWHAT, OUR VATICAN CONTACTS OFFERED A LESS STRIDENT ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION. JOZEF MAJ OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF CHRISTIAN UNITY, AND HOLY SEE OFFICE DIRECTOR FOR GEORGIA JULIO MURAT BOTH REFUTED THE CHARGE OF GEORGIAN NATIONALIST GURAM SHARADZE AND OTHERS THAT THE VATICAN HAD CONDUCTED SECRET NEGOTIATIONS TO "MAKE CATHOLICISM A STATE RELIGION." MURAT SAID THERE HAD BEEN "CONVERSATIONS" BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH REGARDING THE ACCORD,

AND THE CHURCH HAD BEEN WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT TO GUARD AGAINST OFFENDING THE ORTHODOX CHURCH. THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OF TRYING TO GAIN PRIMACY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN GEORGIA -- ONLY TO GUARANTEE ITS RIGHTS, HE SAID. THOUGH SOME GEORGIAN ORTHODOX MAY FEEL A PSYCHOLOGICAL THREAT, THE HOLY SEE INSISTED THERE WAS NOTHING FOR THE ORTHODOX TO FEAR LEGALLY. FURTHER, MAJ CONTINUED, THE CHURCH HAD NO GRAND PLANS FOR PROSELYTISM IN GEORGIA.

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PRESSURE FROM EXTREMISTS, HOWEVER, THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND.  
IN THE VIEW OF OUR  
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FORCED THE GOG'S BACKTRACK. IN FACT, MURAT SAID HE HAD HEARD  
RUMORS THAT THE  
ORTHODOX CHURCH HAD PAID DEMONSTRATORS TO AGITATE AGAINST THE  
AGREEMENT.

HOLY SEE REALISTIC ABOUT GEORGIAN PRESSURES

15. (C) MURAT WAS REALISTIC AND, TO SOME EXTENT, UNDERSTANDING  
ABOUT THE FLAP.  
HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE CHALLENGES AND CHANGE GEORGIAN SOCIETY  
HAD EXPERIENCED IN  
RECENT YEARS, SAYING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAD TO "UNDERSTAND  
AND APPRECIATE  
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HE ALSO RECOGNIZED THE DIFFICULT BALANCING ACT PRESIDENT  
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COMMENT: WHAT'S NEXT?

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EXPECT TO SEE THIS LAW ANY TIME SOON IN LIGHT OF THIS RECENT  
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17. (C) AS FOR THE FLAP'S GENERAL EFFECT ON WIDER  
ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC RELATIONS,  
OUR VATICAN SOURCES ARE SEEKING TO PREVENT IT FROM  
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THE FACTORS THAT  
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SPECIFIC TO GEORGIA -- THE INFLUENCE OF THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX  
CHURCH IN  
THE COUNTRY, POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS CAUSED BY SEPARATIST  
ABKHAZIA, AND THE  
COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE  
ORTHODOX CHURCH.  
NEVERTHELESS, THE INCIDENT REINFORCES THE CURRENT  
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THE POPE, AS MAJ  
EMPHASIZES, WANTS RECONCILIATION WITH THE ORTHODOX, BUT NOT  
"AT ANY COST."  
ANY RAPPROCHEMENT HAS TO BE BASED ON "MUTUAL RESPECT AND  
CONSIDERATION."  
FROM THE HOLY SEE'S PERSPECTIVE, THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH  
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FENCE-MENDING TO DO ON THIS ACCOUNT.

NICHOLSON

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